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DEVELOPMENT OF EXTENSION SERVICE UNDER THE SMITH-LEVER ACT

A radio talk by H.J.C. Umberger, Director of Extension Service, Manhattan, Kansas, delivered in the farm and home radio hour featuring the 20th anniversary signing of the Smith-Lever Act, May 8, 1934, and broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations.

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In the debates in Congress which preceded the enactment of the Smith-Lever law, the expectation was repeatedly expressed that through this Act new facts could be made more readily available to farmers whereby a more rapid increase in agricultural production might be attained.

The Smith-Lever Act came into being at a time when foreign creditor nations and a rapidly developing American industry were accelerating the demand for agricultural production. Frequent predictions were made at that time that inevitably within the time of those living there would be difficulty in feeding an increasing population and in maintaining a favorable export surplus.

All the conditions which prevailed made feasible the philosophy expressed in the objective of that old adage by Jonathan Swift, --"Whoever can make two blades of grass to grow on a spot of ground where only one grew before deserves well of mankind."

Under the attitude of mind prevailing at that time it is not difficult to understand why the Extension Service and the agencies under its control would be considered advisory rather than social, and why the opportunity to develop the social resources was little considered. It was not generally realized twenty years ago how competent was the American rural population to observe intelligently and to determine new facts for themselves, to devise practical procedure, and to apply this newly acquired learning effectively. Certainly none comprehended the possibilities of a localized social organization, self-sufficient and wholly competent to develop information, methods of procedure and instructional ability, and with remarkably competent leadership.

It is a notable tribute to Extension Work that in these twenty years the general efficiency of the American farmer has been increased approximately twenty per cent. Even had not the World War with all of its profound influences upon world agricultural trade intervened and had the demand for agricultural production progressed as it did prior to the inception of the Smith-Lever Act, it is all probability because of the service provided through this Act, there would have been no dearth of food supply and the American farmer under the stimulus of the Extension Service would have increased production sufficiently to have adequately cared for any development, industrial or otherwise, which might have taken place.

Remarkable as have been the influences of Extension upon production practices this accomplishment is insignificant in comparison to the social influences for which it is directly responsible. In every state an effective and influential extension organization exists. Through this organization, leadership is provided and interested individuals serve effectively under intelligently made plans to conduct projects in agricultural production, and to promote the health and contentment of rural communities through recreation and better living habits. Boys and girls are provided with a wide latitude of opportunity to gain practical experience and to make extensive contacts through which their outlook on life

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and their attitudes are improved. In Kansas alone there are some 60,000 people definitely affiliated with either the agricultural, the home economics, or 4-H club work, and the individuals who have assumed definite leadership responsibilities in one or any other of these projects total more than 15,000.

It has been through this organized leadership that the Extension Service has become a powerful factor in making farmers of the nation conscious of their place in American life. Extension Work has had a prominent part in the development of the higher standards of living that have been established in our agricultural areas. With these higher standards of living and broader viewpoints have come the ability to see the complicated relationships which exist among different classes and different institutions of men. Had it not been for the Extension organization with its rural leadership which possessed a wide experience and an understanding of the complicated relationships between classes of men and their interests, the general adoption of a program as complex as the Agricultural Adjustment program would have been an impossible undertaking.

In my judgment rural America has a greater spirit of cooperation; a better knowledge of social and economic relationships. It not only has a keener appreciation of science in government and an increasing confidence in universal education, but it has a finer spiritual belief than has heretofore existed. Much of this is due largely to the Extension Service which has developed and functioned so effectively during the last twenty years.

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